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ABSTRACT

Reviewed were reports of 50 parent-teacher conferences involving pre-primary through secondary level students; information as to the nature, content, and outcome was obtained; and conferences involving teachers of self-contained classes were compared with those involving resource teachers. Results indicated that the teachers initiated conferences most frequently, with the most frequent rationale in relation to the child's behavior, followed by status (reporting progress), testing/evaluation/placement, combined academic and behavior problems, and academic problems. Behavior disorders resource teachers had the highest frequency of conferences, followed closely by teachers of the educable mentally retarded in self-contained classrooms. Teachers of children with behavior problems tended to have series of parent conferences, and the greater the degree of parental involvement called for, the higher the probability of successful resolution of the difficulty. (IM)

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ABSTRACTED-CEC ERIC

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THE ROLE OF THE RESOURCE TEACHER IN PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCING

INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement in relation to the education of exceptional children continues to be a concern of special educators, from the child's preschool years into adulthood (Clements and Alexander, 1975, Karnes and Zehrbach, 1972, Kelly, 1976 Kroth, 1975.) While the nature and extent of parental involvement may vary widely and be at least partially dependent upon an array of variables and circumstances unamendable to manipulation, many educators continue to act on their perceptions of the necessity for or the potential value inherent in parent-teacher communication and cooperation (Warfield, 1975).

A number of studies have investigated several dimensions of parent-teacher conferencing from various perspectives (Alexander, 1975; Clements and Simpson, 1974; Kroth, Whelan and Stables, 1970; McKenzie, Clark, Wolf, Fothera and Benson, 1968, Burrell, Note 1). These studies support and generalization

> "...that while many educators continue to disparage parental involvement in school affairs, a growing

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> number favors a variety of active home-school relationships. Some of the literature has additionally suggested forms of successful involvement which are possible when school and home constructively focus on a child's behavior and academic problems." (Kelly, 1974, p. 21)

The purpose of this study was to attempt to obtain information relative to the nature, content, and outcome of parent-teacher conferences conducted by teachers in a large southeastern city enrolled in a graduate course on parent-teacher conferencing. Of specific concern were similarities and differences of parent-teacher conferences involving teachers of self-contained classes compared to parent Resource-teacher conferences.

METHOD

Analyses were made of fifty parent-teacher conference write-ups to obtain descriptors, categories and classification information.

The assigned task to the teachers enrolled in the parent-conferencing course was to conduct and "write-up" four parent-teacher conferences by completion of the three-month course. Purposes, nature and scope of the conferences were left to the discretion of the teacher, with the instructor's encouragement that the conferences serve a functional purpose to the teacher

child, and/or parents. Teachers were also urged to plan, facilitate, and evaluate the conferences.

RESULTS

Results from 42 write-ups of parent conferences (8 were excluded from the data reported here because they didn't meet the criterion of classroom teacher) indicated that the teachers initiated by far the majority of conferences. In 151 conferences (series conferences were only counted as one contact in this instance), teacher initiated 139 conferences and mothers initiated 9, 3 of which were with resource teachers, 6 with self-contained teachers. Principals initiated 2 conferences, and a mental health agency initiated 1. A further breakdown of this information relative to frequency of conferences by type of services delivery system (self-contained as compared to resource, for example) type of exceptionality served, and age level of the child indicates that the most frequent conferencing was with parents of elementary-age children (83). The next highest frequency of conferences was with parents of primary-age children (30), while the lowest frequency occurred with parents of middle and junior high-aged children.

Insert Table I Here

In terms of class type by exceptionality served, behavior disorders resource teachers had the highest frequency of conferences (21), followed closely by EMR self-contained teachers (18). The total number of conferences held was 162.

Another point of interest in attempting to differentiate between and among teacher-parent conferences was the question of who was involved in the conference in addition to a teacher and parent. The differences were not appreciable between Resource and self-contained teachers except in relation to conferences involving other teachers, (14 compared to 3), conferences with psychologists and/or counselors involved (5 compared to 0), and conferences including the child (4 compared to 1). Higher frequencies were reported by resource teachers as compared to self-contained teachers.

Another major concern was the rationale for the parent-teacher conference. By far the most frequent reason (resource and self-contained) was in relation to the child's behavior. This included conferences relative to absences or truancy, language problems, squealing, behavior problems in the classroom or on the bus, stealing, bizarre behavior, etc. The next most frequent occuring rationales for parent-

teacher conferences are subsumed in the category designated as Status. This category was comprised of conferences having as their intent and focus apprising parents of their child's relative progress academically and socially. These were progress report conferences without the component of problem solving implied in the Academic or Behavior categories. Grade reporting and information giving was the primary intent.

The third most frequently occurring reasons for conferencing are reflected in the category of Testing/Evaluation/Placement. These conferences involved arranging for testing and evaluation, information sharing relative to assessment results, and authorization or facilitation of placement in or out of special education.

The fourth most frequently occurring reason for conferencing was in relation to combined Academic and Behavior Problems, followed by the category of Academic problems. Note that in the category of Status, most conferences were singular, whereas those in the "problem" categories (Academic, Behavior and Combined) were series of conferences.

Insert Table 2 here

A further analysis of conference types by program delivery type and exceptionality served shows that the most frequent reason for conferences by E.M.R. teachers was related to problems of behavior, whereas T.M.R. teachers most frequently conferred about the child's status.

Insert Table 3 here

E.D. resource teachers conferenced most frequently about combined academic and behavioral problems. L.D. resource teachers reasons for conferencing were more evenly distributed between status, testing, behavior and combined academic and behavior problems.

The most frequent reason for conferencing by teachers in combined resource rooms (these were all at the primary grade level) was behavior problems. In self-contained regular classes, most frequent singular conferences were in regard to the child's status, while the most frequent series conferences were in relation to academic problems.

Another question relative to these parent-teacher conferences was the degree of parent involvement and action called for in relation to the type of parent conferences conducted. This was catagorized on a continuum from none to a full parent-teacher program that included

parents keeping data, consequating behavior, and frequent or daily communication with the teacher.

Insert Table 4 here

The category of None was subdivided into none called for and none done to distinguish between action called for and carried out. The category of Information Exchange was typified by parent and teacher agreement to keep in touch with each other relative to the child's progress and included written and phone conversation contact, as well as periodic face-to-face conferences.

The category of Parents Consequate is reflective of a "step up" in degree of parent involvement and included provisions for feedback between teacher and parent. These conferences might be characterized as a little program for improvement, such as having the parents help the child on some of his academics, having the parents reinforce improved classroom or academic behavior, or having the parents instigate some behavior management strategies. The column of All Except Parents Keep Data represents a full parent-teacher cooperative program called for, just as Full PTP, with the only exception being the requirement of parents to keep daily records of the child's behavior.

It should be noted that this was entirely appropriate in many instances, most especially in relation to behaviors occurring almost exclusively in the classroom.

As expected, the degree of parent involvement or action called for was lowest in conferences concerned with Status reports and Testing/Evaluation/Placement type conferences although it's interesting to note that six Information Exchange programs and three Parents Consequate programs were engendered or instigated relative to Status conferences. In the None Done column, the conferences related to Status reflect a mother disregarding a teacher's suggestion that the child be dropped off in front of the school rather than hand-carried to the classroom (Mother was concerned about her child crying when she left him in the classroom), and another mother who disregarded suggestions that she help formulate new goals and objectives in relation to her child's educational program. The two None Done AXB reflect one instance lack of action by a parent to arrange for a neurological exam for her child and failure to contact a mental health agency for family counseling. The other was a situation in which a mother was apprised of her child's academic and behavioral problems and agreed to frequent

feedback relative to results of teacher interventions and consistently failed to do so until the father was included in a conference. The None Done on Health was failure of a mother to obtain Ritalin for her child.

In the Parents' Consequate column, Program Information row, parents wrote and mailed 98 letters to congressmen relative to the release of Title VI funds for special education programs. In the Status row, the parents were given information by the teachers on "how to help a little at home", at the parents request. In the Testing/Evaluation/Placement row, parents took their child to a new M.R. work-study program in order to encourage his enrollment. The Academic, Behavior, and AXB rows were comprised mainly of actions taken by parents at the specific direction and request of the child's teacher. The one instance of parent consequation in the Health row involved a mother taking her child to the doctor and obtaining medication.

The last two columns represent extensive parent involvement with the teacher in relation to the child and reflect to some degree the difficulties the child was encountering at a point in time in being able to profit from his educational experiences without parental involvement.

As such, the difficulties could be characterized as moderate to severe problems. The one instance in the Health row in the category of extensive parent involvement was in relation to a diet plan for an overweight child.

A final analysis of the parent-teacher conference information was undertaken to attempt to discern relative outcomes or results of the conferences in relation to the child based on actions called for in terms of degree of parental involvement. The information reported in terms of results was that which had occurred by the end of the teachers' reports or records, so that there are no prognoses reported. Where no action was called for, outcomes were not recorded.

Insert Table 5 here

The criterions for the characterizations of the child's behavior as worse, equivocal/stable, improved, and much improved were in some instances the subjective assessment of effects by the author based on less than desirable levels of empirical evidence presented in the reports by the teachers. In other instances, no judgement was necessary, the data spoke for itself.

Note that series conferences entailing extensive parental involvement tended to a high ratio of improved and much improved outcomes with low ratios of no reported outcomes, while the parent consequate level of involvement tended to improvement, but with higher frequencies of no reported outcome.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

There are a number of shortcomings to this study, with sample bias being the most obvious, and as such, the most delimiting in terms of generalizations that can be made from the data. A number of related problems that are frequently inherent in ex post facto research were unresolved to the satisfaction of the writer, such as assignment of a conference to a distinct classification type, when in fact, the conference may have had more than one focus or intent. However, the analysis does indicate that the majority of parent teacher conferences were successful in terms of actions called for and outcome effected in relation to the child as a product of the conferences. Teachers of children experiencing moderate to severe academic and behavior problems tended to have series of conferences with parents

toward resolution of the child's difficulties, whereas singular conferences were more likely to call for minimal parent involvement and focus on conveying information about the child's relative progress in school, results of evaluations of the child's abilities and disabilities and recommendations for placement. In addition, the greater the degree of parental involvement called for, the higher the probability of successful resolution of the difficulty being experienced by the child.

Although the numerical differences within categories were small, resource teachers had more series conferences, conferences concerned with behavior and combined behavior and academic problems, and conferences that involved other teachers and school personnel in comparison to self-contained teachers. While analyses of the significance of these differences are beyond the scope of this investigation, the implications relative to skills and abilities needed by resource teachers beyond those generally associated with classroom teaching effectiveness are evident.

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T A B L E 1

Class Type and Exceptionality Served X Age Levels

	PrePrimary	Primary	Elementary	Middle	Secondary
Resource					
TMR					4
Hearing Impaired			2		
EMR					9
BD		7	21	2	
LD		5	15		
Combination		1	10	4	6
Self Contained					
EMR		5	19	3	4
TMR	5	6	8		
Hearing Impaired	4				
Multiply Handicapped	4				
Regular Class	1	9	10		

Total 162

TABLE 2

RATIONALE FOR CONFERENCING

	Single	Series
Program Information	4	3
Child's Status	20	6
Testing/Evaluation/Placement	13	4
Academic Problems	3	7
Behavior Problems	4	26
Academic and Behavior Problems	3	12
Health	3	2

TABLE 3

FREQUENCY OF SINGULAR AND SERIES CONFERENCES BY RATIONALE OF CONFERENCE AND CLASS TYPES

	EMR		TMR		HI		BD	LD	Combination	Regular	ME
	RR	SC	RR	SC	RR	SC	RR	RR	RR	SC	SC
Program Information											1
Single	2	1			1		1				1
Series	1		1								
Child Status											
Single	2	1		4			1	3	1	6	
Series				2			1	1	1		1
Testing/Ev./Plmt							4	3	2	3	
Single		2									
Series				1		1	1				
Academic Prob										1	
Single							1	1		4	
Series		1									
Behavior Prob							1	1			
Single		2									
Series	2	3	1	2	1		3	2	4	1	
A and B Prob								1		1	
Single							5	2	2	1	1
Series		2		1							
Health							1		1		
Single			1				1				
Series				2							

TABLE 4

Action Taken by Parents by Conference Rationale

	Called	None For	Done	Information Exchange	Parents Consequate	All Except Parent Keep Data	Full Parent Teacher Program
Program Information	3			1	1		
Child's Status	12		2	6	3		
Testing/ Ev/Plant	8			1	1		
Acad Prob				1	5	7	
Beh. Prob	4			1	7	8	9
A and B Prob			2	1	4	4	7
Health	2		1	1	1	1	

TABLE 5

OUTCOME BY ACTIONS CALLED FOR

	Information Exchange		Parents Consequate		All Except Parent Keep Data		Full Parent Teacher Program	
	Single	Series	Single	Series	Single	Series	Single	Series
Worse		1						
Equivocal/Stable	2	3		3		2		
Improved	1		3	8	2	6		8
Much Improved				4	1	6		6
None Reported	3	1	2	4		1		2